ROBERT S. BREWER, JR. 1 United States Attorney 2 BRUCE C. SMITH Assistant U.S. Attorney California State Bar No. 078225 3 Federal Office Building 880 Front Street, Room 6293 4 San Diego, California 92101-8893 Telephone: (619) 546-8266 5 E-mail: bruce.smith@usdoj.gov 6 Attorneys for Plaintiff United States of America 7 8 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 9 SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA Case No. '19CV0289 MMAJLB 10 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, Plaintiff, COMPLAINT FOR 11 **FORFEITURE** 12 V. \$11,800.00 IN U.S. CURRENCY, 13 Defendant. 14 15 By way of complaint against the defendant, \$11,800.00 IN U.S. CURRENCY 16 17

("defendant \$11,800.00 in currency"), the United States of America alleges:

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- 1. This Court has jurisdiction over this action by virtue of the provisions of Title 28, United States Code, Section 1355(a) and Title 21, United States Code, Section 881(a)(6), because the defendant \$11,800.00 in currency constitutes money furnished or intended to be furnished in exchange for a controlled substance, or proceeds traceable to an exchange for a controlled substance in violation of Chapter 13 of Title 21, United States Code.
- 2. Venue is proper in this district pursuant to Title 28, United States Code, Section 1395 because the defendant \$11,800.00 in currency was found in this district.
- 3. On September 24, 2018, in the Southern District of California, United States Postal Inspection Service ("USPIS") Inspector Sprague was contacted by a United States

Postal Service ("USPS") employee at the USPS Midway Postal Facility, in the Southern District of California.

A. On or about September 17, 2018, at a location in Winston Salem, North Carolina, a USPS Priority Mail Express parcel with a tracking number ending in "8787 US" ("USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US") was mailed to an address in

San Diego, California, and was scheduled to be delivered on September 18, 2018.

- B. On September 18, 2018, USPIS Inspector Sprague directed the USPS employees at the Midway Postal Facility to hold USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US for USPIS Inspector Sprague.
- 4. USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US was addressed to Hilda Ortega, at 10353 San Diego Mission Road #220, San Diego, California 92108, with an addressee contact telephone number of (619) 359-7580.
- 5. USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US had a return or sender's address of Jerome Simpson, 2240 Glenn Avenue, Winston Salem, North Carolina 27105, with a sender's contact telephone number of (336) 705-1911.
- 6. Based upon Inspector Sprague' training and experience, USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US was suspected of containing proceeds from the sale and distribution of controlled substances, currency to be used to purchase controlled substances, or controlled substances.
- 7. USPIS Inspectors Sprague was trained and experienced and knew persons engaged in the distribution of controlled substances will use the USPS Priority Mail Express service as a means of transmitting controlled substances, controlled substance sales proceeds or currency sent for the purchase of controlled substances. Although the USPS Priority Mail Express service is relatively expensive, it is reliable, secure, and discrete.
- 8. Inspector Sprague suspected USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US contained monetary instruments or currency involved in the interstate distribution of controlled substances for, among other things, the following reasons:

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- A. The size, shape and appearance of USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US was similar to other Priority Mail Express parcels encountered by USPIS inspectors in previous investigations which contained large amounts of currency. In those instances, the currency was determined to constitute controlled substance sales proceeds or currency sent for the purchase of controlled substances.
- B. The entries on the label of USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US were hand-written. The label did not contain a business account number. The trained and experienced USPIS inspectors knew USPS Priority Mail and Express Mail Parcels are typically used by businesses or commercial postal service customers. The typical USPS Express Mail service customer generates mechanically printed labels which the customer affixes to the Express Mail parcel.
- C. USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US weighed approximately one (1) pound, and cost the sender \$24.70 in postage.
- D. USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US was sent from a location in North Carolina, a state known by trained and experienced USPIS inspectors to be a destination state for controlled substances.
- E. USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US was addressed to an individual in the Southern District of California, a district known by trained and experienced USPIS inspectors to be a source district for controlled substances, especially marijuana.
- F. The shipping label on USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US reflected a sender or return address of 2240 Glenn Avenue, Winston Salem, North Carolina 27105.
- G. Inspector Sprague researched law enforcement databases and determined 1121 North Florissant Road, Winston Salem, North Carolina 27105 was a valid address, but was occupied by a building long abandoned.
- H. Inspector Sprague spoke with a USPS mail delivery worker assigned to serve customers in the neighborhood where 1121 North Florissant Road, Winston Salem,

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North Carolina 27105 is located, and learned that even when the premises was occupied, no one by the name of "Jerome Simpson" received mail at that address.

- On October 15, 2018, USPIS Inspector Sprague searched law I. enforcement databases and determined the sender's telephone contact number entered on the shipping label of USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US, to wit, (336) 705-1911, is a Bandwidth line with no listed subscriber name.
- J. On October 15, 2018, USPIS Inspector Sprague called the sender's telephone contact number entered on the shipping label of USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US, to wit, (336) 705-1911, but encountered what appeared to be an inactive or disconnected number.
- K. Inspector Sprague was trained and experienced, and knew shippers and distributors of controlled substances and proceeds from the sale and distribution of controlled substances will frequently use false names, addresses, and contact information on shipping labels to avoid identification and detection by law enforcement.
- L. Inspector Sprague noted the sender's zip code entered on the shipping label of USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US, 27105, was not the zip code where the parcel was mailed or posted.
- M. Inspector Sprague was trained and experienced, and knew shippers and distributors of controlled substances and proceeds from the sale and distribution of controlled substances will frequently mail or post their parcels containing controlled substances or proceeds from the sale of controlled substances at USPS facilities located outside their neighborhood or zip code; all for the purpose of making it more difficult for USPS employees to identify them at a later date.
- 9. On September 20, 2018, Inspector Sprague visited the physical location of the addressee on the shipping label of USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US, to wit, 10353 San Diego Mission Road #220, San Diego, California 92108.
 - A. The address was that of an apartment in a large apartment complex.

- B. Inspector Sprague left her USPIS business card at the door, and requested addressee "Hilda Ortega" contact Inspector Sprague about USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US.
- 10. On September 20, 2018, an adult female contacted Inspector Sprague via telephone, identified herself as Hilda Ortega, and expressed an interest in discussing USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US.
- A. The caller said she was expecting a parcel containing approximately \$11,000.00.
- B. The caller said the currency in the parcel she was expecting constituted proceeds from the sale of a motor vehicle the caller sold to an unidentified buyer.
- C. The caller expressed her consent for Inspector Sprague to open USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US, and inspect its contents.
- 11. On September 24, 2018, Inspector Sprague observed a U.S. Customs and Border Protection ("CBP") canine enforcement officer ("CEO") and her trained and certified CBP drug detection dog, "Asta-D", as they conducted an exterior examination of USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US.
 - A. The CBP CEO and Asta-D were trained and certified to work as a team.
- B. Asta-D was trained and certified as a drug detection dog, and trained to respond or "alert" when he encountered scents associated with various controlled substances.
- C. The CBP CEO was trained and experienced working with Asta-D, and was skilled in recognizing Asta-D's alerts.
- D. On September 24, 2018, when Asta-D was exposed to USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US, she alerted, indicating to the CBP CEO Asta-D detected the scent of controlled substances on or inside the parcel.
- E. The CBP CEO told Inspector Sprague Asta-D alerted to USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US, and explained the meaning of the alert.

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- 12. On September 24, 2018, in the Southern District of California, Inspector Sprague, acting on the consent expressed on September 20, 2018 by the female caller who identified herself as addressee "Hilda Ortega", opened USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US.
- A. Inside USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US, Inspector Sprague discovered a magazine.
- B. Inside the magazine, taped to a number or the pages, was a large amount of U.S. currency.
- C. The U.S. currency discovered inside USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US consisted of approximately 590 bills, in various denominations.
- D. The vast majority of the 590 bills, to wit, 538, were bills in the \$20.00 denomination.
- E. Inspector Sprague was trained and experienced and knew sales of controlled substances are virtually always conducted as an exchange of drugs for money.
- F. Inspector Sprague knew the most common denomination of U.S. currency used in retail or street illegal drug sales is the \$20.00 bill.
- G. The currency discovered inside USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US was counted, and determined to be \$11,800.00 in U.S. currency
- H. The currency discovered inside USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US is the defendant \$11,800.00 in currency.
- I. USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US contained no notes or written messages.
- J. Inspector Sprague was trained and experienced, and knew individuals involved in the interstate shipment of controlled substances and illegal drug sales proceeds via the U.S. Mail will rarely include any written messages, notes, or instructions in their mailings. This is in stark contrast with typical personal or business mailings which contain writings or messages from the sender to the recipient.

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- 13. On September 24, 2018, Inspector Sprague telephonically contacted the woman who, on September 20, 2018, identified herself to Inspector Sprague as the addressee on the shipping label for USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US, to wit, Hilda Ortega ("Ms. Ortega").
- A. Ms. Ortega said approximately two (2) weeks earlier, she purchased a 2013 Volkswagen motor vehicle from an unidentified male for \$8,000.00 in cash.
- B. Ms. Ortega said she did not register the 2013 Volkswagen in her name with the California Department of Motor Vehicles.
- C. Ms. Ortega said she purchased the 2013 Volkswagen for the purpose of selling it and making a profit.
- D. Ms. Ortega told Inspector Sprague she was in possession of the 2013 Volkswagen and the title documents for the vehicle.
- E. Ms. Ortega said she listed the 2013 Volkswagen for sale on the Internet, on Craigslist.
- F. Ms. Ortega said a male who identified himself to Ms. Ortega as "Jerome Simpson" from the State of North Carolina contacted her as an interested buyer.
- G. Ms. Ortega told Inspector Sprague she spoke telephonically with "Jerome Simpson" and, during their conversation(s), Ms. Ortega agreed to sell the vehicle to him.
- H. Ms. Ortega explained when she received payment from "Jerome Simpson", she and "Jerome Simpson" would negotiate when and where Ms. Ortega would deliver the 2013 Volkswagen vehicle.
- I. Ms. Ortega told Inspector Sprague she thought buyer "Jerome Simpson" was going to make payment using a cashier's check.
- J. Inspector Sprague asked Ms. Ortega to provide Inspector Sprague with a photocopy of the title documents for the 2013 Volkswagen vehicle, as well as a copy of the Craigslist advertisement.

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- K. Ms. Ortega failed to provide the requested vehicle title, Craigslist advertisement, or any other form of corroboration for her story about the vehicle or the transactions.
- 14. Based upon the facts and evidence gathered by USPIS Inspector Sprague during the investigation of USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US, the defendant \$11,800.00 in currency, discovered in USPS Priority Mail Express parcel #8787 US, was seized for forfeiture.
- 15. USPIS initiated administrative forfeiture proceedings against the defendant \$11,800.00 in currency and, on November 2, 2018, direct notice was sent to Ms. Hilda Ortega at 10353 San Diego Mission Road, #220, San Diego, in the Southern District of California.
- 16. On December 7, 2018, USPIS received a written Claim Of Ownership ("Claim") regarding the defendant \$11,800.00 in currency from Attorney Dante Pride on behalf of Hilda Ortega.
- A. The Claim contained a number of statements and representations made by claimant Hilda Ortega.
- B. Each statement and representation by claimant Hilda Ortega was described by her as truthful, and each was made under penalty of perjury.
- 17. In her Claim, Hilda Ortega made the following statements and representations:
- A. In late October 2018, Hilda Ortega attempted to sell a 2013 Volkswagen on the website, www.craigslist.com.
- B. Hilda Ortega was contacted about the 2013 Volkswagen by a person Hilda Ortega believes is named "Jason Simpson", a potential buyer.
- C. Hilda Ortega and Jason Simpson agreed upon a selling price of \$11,800.00.
- D. Hilda Ortega and Jason Simpson agreed that Jason Simpson's "agent" would take delivery of the 2013 Volkswagen from Hilda Ortega.

- E. Hilda Ortega and Jason Simpson agreed, after an unspecified period of time, Jason Simpson would send Hilda Ortega full payment for the 2013 Volkswagen via the U.S. Mail.
- F. Two (2) weeks after Hilda Ortega delivered the 2013 Volkswagen to Jason Simpson's agent, Jason Simpson sent his payment, in the form of cash, to Hilda Ortega in the U.S. Mail.
- G. Hilda Ortega is uncertain of the name of the buyer, but suspects his name appears on the parcel in which the currency was sent.
- The defendant \$11,800.00 in currency constitutes money furnished or 18. intended to be furnished in exchange for a controlled substance, in violation of Chapter 13, Title 21, United States Code.
- Alternatively, the defendant \$11,800.00 in currency constitutes proceeds of or 19. proceeds traceable to an exchange for a controlled substance, in violation of Chapter 13, Title 21, United States Code.
- 20. Alternatively, the defendant \$11,800.00 in currency was used or intended to be used to facilitate an exchange for a controlled substance, in violation of Chapter 13, Title 21, United States Code.
- 21. As a result of the foregoing, the defendant \$11,800.00 IN U.S. CURRENCY is liable to condemnation and to forfeiture to the United States for its use in accordance with Title 21, United States Code, Section 881(a)(6).
- 22. The defendant \$11,800.00 IN U.S. CURRENCY is presently deposited within the jurisdiction of this Court.

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Case 3:19-cv-00289-MMA-JLB Document 1 Filed 02/08/19 PageID.10 Page 10 of 10

WHEREFORE, the United States prays that due process issue to enforce the forfeiture of the defendant \$11,800.00 IN U.S. CURRENCY, and that due notice be given to all interested parties to appear and show cause why said forfeiture should not be declared. DATED: February 8, 2019 ROBERT S. BREWER, JR. **United States Attorney** s/Bruce C. Smith BRUCE C. SMITH Assistant U.S. Attorney

SJS 44 (Rev. 1207) Case 3:19-cv-00289-MMA-JLB Pocument 1-2 SFiled 02/08/19 PageID.12 Page 1 of 1

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON THE REVERSE OF THE FORM.)

I. (a) PLAINTIFFS			DEFENDANTS		
United States of America			\$11,800.00 in U.S. Currency		
(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff (EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES) (c) Attorney's (Firm Name, Address, and Telephone Number) AUSA Bruce C. Smith, Phone: (619) 546-8266 USAO, 880 Front Street, Room 6293, San Diego, CA 92101-889			County of Residence of First Listed Defendant (IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY) NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE LAND INVOLVED. Attorneys (If Known) 19 CV0289 MMAJLB		
				RINCIPAL PARTIES	(Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintiff
■ U.S. Government Plaintiff	☐ 3 Federal Question (U.S. Government Not a Party)		(For Diversity Cases Only) PT en of This State		
☐ 2 U.S. Government Defendant	☐ 4 Diversity	Citize	en of Another State	2	
Defendant	(Indicate Citizenship of Parties in Item III)		en or Subject of a reign Country		
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CONTRACT	TORTS		ORFEITURE/PENALTY	BANKRUPTCY	OTHER STATUTES
□ 110 Insurance □ 120 Marine □ 130 Miller Act □ 140 Negotiable Instrument □ 150 Recovery of Overpayment & Enforcement of Judgment □ 151 Medicare Act □ 152 Recovery of Defaulted Student Loans (Excl. Veterans) □ 153 Recovery of Overpayment of Veteran's Benefits □ 160 Stockholders' Suits □ 190 Other Contract □ 195 Contract Product Liability □ 196 Franchise REAL PROPERTY □ 210 Land Condemnation □ 220 Foreclosure □ 230 Rent Lease & Ejectment □ 240 Torts to Land □ 245 Tort Product Liability □ 290 All Other Real Property	Slander □ 368 Asbestos Personal □ 330 Federal Employers' Injury Product Liability Liability □ 340 Marine Product □ 370 Other Fraud	620 620 620 620 630 630 640	0 Agriculture 0 Other Food & Drug 5 Drug Related Seizure of Property 21 USC 881 0 Liquor Laws 0 R.R. & Truck 0 Airline Regs. 0 Occupational Safety/Health 0 Other LABOR 0 Fair Labor Standards Act 0 Labor/Mgmt. Relations 0 Labor/Mgmt. Reporting & Disclosure Act 0 Railway Labor Act 0 Other Labor Litigation 1 Empl. Ret. Inc. Security Act IMMIGRATION 2 Naturalization Application 3 Habeas Corpus - Alien Detainee 5 Other Immigration Actions	□ 422 Appeal 28 USC 158 □ 423 Withdrawal 28 USC 157 PROPERTY RIGHTS □ 820 Copyrights □ 840 Trademark SOCIAL SECURITY □ 861 HIA (1395ff) □ 862 Black Lung (923) □ 863 DIWC/DIWW (405(g)) □ 864 SSID Title XVI □ 865 RSI (405(g)) FEDERAL TAX SUITS □ 870 Taxes (U.S. Plaintiff or Defendant) □ 871 IRS—Third Party 26 USC 7609	□ 400 State Reapportionment □ 410 Antitrust □ 430 Banks and Banking □ 450 Commerce □ 460 Deportation □ 470 Racketeer Influenced and
▼1 Original □ 2 R	tate Court Appellate Court	Reop	ened another (specific		
VI. CAUSE OF ACTI	ON Cite the U.S. Civil Statute under which you are 21 U.S.C. Section 881 Brief description of cause: Narcotics trafficking	c ming (i	Do not the jurisdiction?	is statutes unless diversity).	
VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:	9	DI	EMAND \$	CHECK YES only JURY DEMAND:	if demanded in complaint:
VIII. RELATED CAS IF ANY	SE(S) (See instructions): JUDGE			DOCKET NUMBER	
DATE 02/08/2019	SIGNATURE OF ATT S/ Bruce C. Smi		OF RECORD		
FOR OFFICE USE ONLY					
RECEIPT#A	AMOUNT APPLYING IFP		JUDGE	MAG. JUI	DGE